5-16-1991

# SR-90-91-(128)280 (AP)

Marshall University

ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE
Recommendation

# SR-90-91-(128)280 (AP)

To approve the substantive issues in the attached "General Education Philosophy Statement" as a working document for implementation.

**RATIONALE:** After nearly a year and a half, the General Education philosophy is ready to be presented to the Faculty Senate. The General Education plenary committee, after reviewing Marshall University's Mission statement and engaging in numerous discussions, created task forces which would look at those elements considered to be basic to a coherent undergraduate education. These task forces met with the plenary committee, the chair of the Academic Planning Committee and the President of the Faculty Senate for three full-day workshops (January 8 - 10, 1991) to debate and formulate the philosophy.

On March 8, 1991, the task force chairs and plenary committee met in joint session with members of the Academic Planning Committee where the philosophy was approved with recommended changes. The document you see before you was unanimously approved by the task force chairs on April 15, 1991, incorporating those suggested revisions as well as some by the general editors. It was approved by the Academic Planning Committee on April 18, 1991.

**FACULTY SENATE PRESIDENT:**

APPROVED
BY SENATE: Kathryn Cheyle DATE: 5/16/91

DISAPPROVED
BY SENATE: _____ DATE: _____

**UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT:**

APPROVED: Alan B. Stewart DATE: 5/29/91

DISAPPROVED: _____ DATE: _____

**COMMENTS:**

# MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

## GENERAL EDUCATION PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT

### PREAMBLE

The purpose of general education is to provide students with strategies for continued learning in a complex and changing world. General education should foster in students the realization that knowledge has broad applications in their lives. Life demands that our graduates be able to examine assumptions, interpret experiences, derive meaning from those experiences, entertain alternative interpretations, weigh implications, and project possible consequences. These tasks are part of the successful living of a life and far exceed the boundaries of any discipline. The general education program outlined in this document emphasizes how knowledge can be experienced and personalized so that what might have been trivial becomes memorable.

We propose a general education program which will prepare Marshall students to respond appropriately in a complex and dynamic world. While this program may contain components associated with a core, general, or liberal program of study, it is designed specifically to meet the needs of Marshall students entering the environment in which they will live and work. This preamble addresses the larger goals which all general education courses should share and the approach to teaching and learning most appropriate to achieving these goals.

The general education program has six primary objectives:

1. To develop critical thinking;

2. To develop ways of communicating;

3. To introduce students to the kinds of knowledge housed within the academic disciplines;

4. To demonstrate to students the methods by which knowledge is created and used within a discipline;

5. To show how knowledge from a variety of sources can be selected and synthesized to solve problems, make decisions, or create new knowledge;

6. To create an awareness of cultural points of view as well as strategies for crossing disciplinary boundaries in effective ways.

In pursuit of these goals, it is necessary that general education provide not merely discrete bodies of knowledge from the disciplines but also skills and strategies for using this knowledge. Experiences

in general education should provide an opportunity to discover how knowledge is created, the uses to which it may be put, an awareness of the difference between opinion and fact, a recognition of the historical and cultural forces which shape opinion, and opportunities for students to engage in spoken and written responses. Students must be able to ask pertinent questions and know how and where to find answers to them. They should learn to do research using a variety of methods and to understand that a depth of knowledge is necessary to answer questions precisely with full consideration of alternative ethical perspectives and consequences.

To promote the level of student involvement and independence of thought, the atmosphere of the general education classroom must be conducive to thinking about knowledge and sharing points of view which lead to true ownership, not merely recitation, of knowledge. Gen Ed must encourage, support, and direct students as they develop their intellectual independence. Students should be encouraged to work together, combining their skills and talents with those of the teacher as partners in the learning process, in which individual differences are acknowledged and respected. They must be encouraged to be simultaneously cooperative and competitive and be challenged to think critically, write fluently and speak effectively. General education should equip students to participate fully in our pluralistic society and the global community. The skills and values they develop through general education must be skills and values they can apply to their own lives.

The teacher's attitude toward these goals is vital to the success of the general education program. In this program it is the teacher who must create the environment in which students have the opportunity to develop the desired skills. The development of investigative skills must occupy at least as important a position as course content. As we present students with meaningful problems and guide them in their attempts to produce original solutions, we need not neglect course content. But this material must be fully integrated into a framework which is likely to become a permanent part of the student's cognitive repertoire. General education must foster independent thought and action. If choices and value judgments remain primarily the domain of the faculty, students will learn to defer to others and to accept as fact what may be only opinion.

The following pages expand on this general statement of goals and philosophy by presenting specific recommendations from task forces organized to research and discuss specific components in the general education program at Marshall University. They are:

1. Communication
2. Multicultural diversity

3. Integrative and cross-disciplinary study
4. The social sciences
5. The fine arts
6. The humanities
7. The natural sciences and mathematics

In each report, the task forces indicate their rationale for inclusion in general education, and the specific goals appropriate to their component.

## COMMUNICATION

There are two compelling reasons for placing the study of communication at the core of an undergraduate education. First, proficiency in oral and written communication provides the foundation for a successful undergraduate experience. A complete communication repertoire is necessary if students are to become active participants in their own education. Second, students must be able to make sophisticated use of computer and telecommunication technologies which they will encounter. Competent communicators have the capacity to adjust to change and to become life-long learners.

The study of communication is fundamental to an undergraduate education. The mastery of communication skills is essential if a student is to succeed during the college years. Furthermore, competent communicators have the capacity to become life-long learners who will be able to adjust to the diverse economic and cultural changes which they will encounter.

The centrally-positioned communication competencies include speaking, listening, reading and writing which must be viewed developmentally. Basic literacy must be required of students who enter the university; however, the university has an obligation to identify and help students who need assistance to meet that standard. Freshman level study of written and oral communication should build upon the skills which have already been acquired. We cannot, however, depend upon freshman level courses alone. Students will not continue to become self-educating thinkers if they do not continue this enabling process from the sophomore year forward. A progressive sophisticated literacy must be integrated into the advanced curriculum in all disciplines at all levels throughout the university.

The ability of students to communicate will be further enhanced by exposure to a second language. The defamiliarization of language involved in the process of acquiring a second one leads students to increased awareness and sensitivity to the structure, vocabulary and syntax of their native language. Moreover, foreign language study helps students understand how language reflects cultural values and traditions. The ability to communicate with other people in their language at any level permits integration into another culture and a perception of that culture from within.

The challenge of the information age demands that the scope of communication education be expanded beyond traditional boundaries. Computer-mediated communication including the ability to access data bases and familiarity with applications software can expedite and improve information-gathering, decision-making and problem solving.

## MULTICULTURAL DIVERSITY

Marshall University's mission statement expresses its commitment "to programs which promote multicultural and international understanding" because multiple and diverse views can contribute to the educational process. Furthermore, our university's policies of non-discrimination in regard to race, color, gender, age, creed, ethnic origin, religion, handicap, or political or sexual orientation explicitly support the values of multiculturalism and pluralism, and supports the ideals of our political heritage.

Multicultural education seeks to develop the "intercultural competence" of Marshall students and faculty through the establishment of varied curricula that propose to develop respect, understanding and knowledge of the pluralistic world in which we live and work today. It fosters the acquisition of values, knowledge and skills that promote living and working cooperatively with diverse people. It promotes critical thinking through reading, writing, listening and speaking experiences that relate to the socio-historical status of multicultural, multiethnic, and alternative views in our pluralistic society. It contributes to the awareness that personal opportunities and choices should not be limited for any reason.

The achievement of multicultural education relies first on the awareness of the culturally specific nature of the values of our own and other cultures. Study of foreign cultures is key in this respect, since such study enables students to identify their own cultural context and to define their cultural values. Study of foreign language is important to the study of foreign cultures, since language is the primary symbol of any culture. Additionally, multiculturalism involves the comprehension of diversity within our own culture, which enables students to recognize the danger of stereotyping and allows greater understanding of and perhaps empathy with perspectives and lifestyles that differ from their own.

A solid grounding in the issue of multicultural diversity will assist students:

1. To understand their own culture better

2. To respond appropriately to values, beliefs, and customs that are different from their own;

3. To understand the subjective, culture-specific nature of their values, beliefs and customs, and those of others;

4. To understand the historical and contemporary processes by which people accommodate each other through the art, language, religion, and customs of other cultures;

5. To use gender- and culture-inclusive language in written and oral communications, and understand the potential of language as a means of liberation or discrimination;

6. To understand the cultural elements that enhance or infringe upon the respect for the rights of individuals, realize that the rights of individuals are associated with legitimate differences, and recognize that in many instances life choices can be culturally imposed and that other options are available;

7. To work toward equitable treatment of all members of society and develop a greater sense of social responsibility.

## INTEGRATIVE AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARY STUDY

At the heart of every student's general education must lie an emphasis on the connectedness of knowledge. General education has frequently been described as a supermarket, in which students purchase the raw materials of learning without knowing the recipes for combining these ingredients into a useful whole. It is therefore imperative that the general education provide specific means by which students can combine their varied studies into a meaningful educational whole. Students must attain an appreciation of the learning process itself and a comprehension of the interconnected nature of knowledge. The appropriate means of achieving these goals are integrative and cross-disciplinary studies.

Integrative and cross-disciplinary study are not synonymous terms. Integrative study means studying each individual component of the general education with the other components in mind. That is, within each discipline included in the program students should be given an opportunity to apply what has been learned by studying other disciplines. Conversely, cross-disciplinary study is itself a specific and separate component of the program. Its purpose is to allow connections between the disciplines to become the primary focus of inquiry.

General education must be integrative if students are to attain an educational whole. Students in all courses should be encouraged to see connections between individual disciplines. They should explore relationships between the kinds of knowledge they

encounter and become aware of the interconnected nature of human activity. They should recognize that themes and methodologies are shared among disciplines. They should begin to integrate discrete learning experiences into an educational whole.

But an integrative approach across the general education program is only a beginning. In order to insure that students develop strategies for synthesizing information from different disciplines, a specific component of the program must be targeted as cross-disciplinary in nature. If students are to comprehend with any depth the interconnected nature of knowledge, they must be provided with an opportunity to develop and apply skills of critical thinking and synthesis in a structured environment and under the guidance of faculty members who themselves are capable of such synthesis. If students are to leave the university with these integrative and synthetic habits of mind, the general education program must include a component in which these skills may become fully developed.

## SOCIAL SCIENCES

The social sciences have in common the concern for the development of human societies in space and time. This includes the historical, present, and future behavior of individuals, interactions among individuals, as well as between individuals and their environment. Students should address the theoretical and empirical methodologies available to model individual and societal behavior, global diversity, the global nature of society and the global allocation of resources.

Students should be able to identify, extract, analyze and interpret relevant data from the multitude of information sources to understand past, explain present and predict future behaviors and societal impacts using the appropriate theories and methodologies. Students should realize that all information is not universally reliable and valid. Using quantitative and qualitative analysis, students should be able to arrive at logical, reasonable conclusions based on the theories of their discipline. In doing so, they should realize that conclusions based on imperfect information have limited validity; and, hence, the consequences of their choices must also be considered. Given the imperfection involved, students should nevertheless be able to make these value choices.

Students should also value global diversity, developing broad perspectives on the views and behavior of individuals in past and present cultures and appreciating the ambiguities and complexities evident therein. The appreciation of other cultures, languages and ethnic groups should be advanced within the student population. Any student should be able to entertain multiple hypotheses with regard to public affairs and see their legitimacy. Issues are to be viewed from a variety of perspectives.

Students need to understand the global nature of contemporary socio-political and economic structures and the factors which have contributed to their development and how they relate to individual behavior. The factors that affect the behavior of individuals and how that behavior in turn allows the individuals to relate to social , economic, political and geographic structures and institutions are important. Students should be familiar with the social, political, economic, geographical and technological forces which have promoted globalization as well as the historical context in which these forces emerged and evolved. Moreover, students should recognize that all people and civilizations are part of a larger process of development within an historical context whereby successful ideas and practices are diffused culturally, thus contributing to the process of globalization.

Students should be able to develop a perspective within the social sciences in order to understand the allocation of resources within a finite environment and the inevitable conflict public policy will confront. The allocation of resources within a finite environment will entail massive change, exerting pressure, and conflict on the individual and on society. Students should be able to make informed judgments on the global differences involving the impact of technology and the influence of societal values in population and economic growth, as well as the use of natural resources in sustaining and promoting economic growth.

The economic processes governing the allocation of resources and the production and distribution of goods should be addressed. Factors contributing to global inequities and the inevitable conflicts individuals and societies confront should be recognized. Students should be able to identify appropriate public policies that address the rate of environmental degradation and the complexities involved in achieving growth in an environmentally sound way. An appreciation of the methods various cultures employ to reduce internal and cross cultural conflict should be understood. The student should be able to identify several defensible roles of industrialized and developing countries in achieving equitable global growth.

Students should develop an understanding of the world's physical and cultural regions. Students should recognize the range and spectrum of economic and political systems in the world, and to perceive the functioning of class systems and power structures.

**THE FINE ARTS**

"The fine arts are aesthetic responses to human nature and experience. They celebrate the best of human endeavor. They contribute to the individual and to society by reflecting and projecting values which shape every culture. They proceed from creation to experience and provide both the artist and audience

with deeper understanding of traditions of human existence and thought. Thus, the fine arts are essential to education." (Marshall University Undergraduate Catalog 1990/1991, Dr. Paul Balshaw, Dean of College of Fine Arts) Traditionally, the Fine Arts have included the following disciplines and studio/performance areas: visual arts which include two- and three-dimensional images in all media as well as architecture; musical arts which include vocal and instrumental performance, and composition for voices and instruments in many different combinations; theatre arts which include play-writing, acting, directing, stage movement (including dance), and the design of sets, costumes, and lighting for live productions; and dance which includes traditional classical ballet, modern dance, and theatrical dance.

The fine arts play a central role in the education of every individual. They provide experience which spans disciplinary and cultural boundaries, enhancing the goals of general education in the following very concrete ways:

1. The fine arts are communication. They are symbolic modes of communicating ideas, emotions and experiences within and between cultures.

2. Because the fine arts allow students to share the experience of others, they are also a primary means of approaching and understanding cultures separated from us in space or in time in a direct and dynamic way.

3. The fine arts facilitate integrative learning. They are a primary means to describe and explain human experiences. All aspects of human experience provide subjects and themes for work of art.

4. The fine arts draw on diverse disciplines for their techniques. The fine arts, therefore, complement and are complemented by all disciplines which reflect the life of humanity.

5. The fine arts are also creative thought and execution; in turn they stimulate critical thinking. The creative process is a critical one: artists select from among their experiences those which have value and significance. No matter what the medium of communication, artists provide stimulation for the intellect. In order to be understood and appreciated, the work of fine art must be encountered, analyzed, interpreted and evaluated. These higher-level thinking processes are applicable to every realm of human endeavor.

6. Because all human beings are consumers of the fine arts, the arts promote life-long learning. It is not necessary

to visit the gallery, the concert hall, or the theatre to experience fine art. Commercial applications of the fine arts bombard us constantly in such forms as graphic design and visual communication, popular music, television and film. By thinking critically about the arts and how they communicate messages, we become aware of how they are used to manipulate our thoughts and behaviors. Understanding and appreciating the fine arts make their content available to us long after formal education has ended.

The general education experiences in the fine arts should provide specific outcomes. Students should:

1. Become acquainted with the languages of the fine arts so that ideas, experiences and emotions communicated by them are understood.

2. Be exposed to the cultural context of works of fine art so that integrative and multicultural learning will occur.

3. Be able to respond articulately and critically to the fine arts so that observation and critical thinking take place.

4. Be provided with direct experiences with works of fine art in the exhibition and performance setting so that they can for themselves interpret and evaluate the value and significance of the works.

## THE HUMANITIES

The humanities investigate people's attempts to find and create meaning in their lives. Through a study of human texts, the humanities teach reflective, critical, and imaginative habits of thought and respect for diverse ideas and values.

The study of texts is central to all humanities disciplines. Conventionally, these texts may take the form of literary works of art or philosophical and religious writings, yet at the same time they often transcend the conventional boundaries of written form to include other kinds of human symbolic behavior, such as oral literature, drama, film, societal and religious ritual, art and music.

These human texts open for students new worlds which both recreate the structures of the perceived world and at the same moment transcend those "realities." Experiencing these alternative worlds defamiliarizes the world of ordinary existence, encourages students to enter other lives, other times, and other circumstances, and enables students to consider the complexities of valuing and the consequences of choosing without the costs of "real" world trial and error. The study of the humanities texts, therefore, focuses students' attention on the act of valuing, while at the same time offering them the "wonder" of taking part in imaginary worlds.

These are practical skills of the public sphere of human life imparted by the humanities:

1. To communicate in the spoken and written word;

2. To use symbols and the techniques of language in a sophisticated manner;

3. To see relationships, analyze, raise questions, take diverse positions and defend them, synthesize and organize ideas and originate new ideas from existing information.

Of equal importance are the humanistic pursuits that are practiced primarily during private, leisure time. Educated individuals use leisure time to realize their needs for engaging in self-appraisal, contemplating the place of human beings in the world, and making critically informed choices. The humanities provide the tools for these necessary activities and focus students' minds on interconnections and ethical values leading to the possibilities of making more informed choices. In complex human situations involving conflicts, students well grounded in the humanities are equipped to discover the wholeness of life, its interdependent nature, and, therefore, the necessity for generosity of spirit and openness toward others who exhibit differing viewpoints. Not only do the humanities allow students to engage the world in a fruitful way, but they also encourage students the ability to explore deeply their inner geography.

In this way the humanities nurture individual lives, build a sense of the individual's community with other people through recognition of common patterns, and enable individuals to create a civilized world through their humane choices. Students who learn through the humanities to use their leisure profitably will accept the responsibility, as individuals, male and female, to be inclusive, participating members of the community as it evolves at the local level, in the nation, and in the world at large.

Students need to develop these skills in the humanities:

1. To understand how language operates as a culturally specific system of symbols, an objective most effectively achieved through foreign language study;

2. To understand how these symbolic texts are valued and revalued over time as each generation examines them anew from its own current perspective, a perspective that is always limited in its scope by such factors as race, gender, sexual orientation, language, and time;

3. To use writing as a mode of learning and as a means for arriving at an understanding of texts and subject matter, not only as a means for demonstrating mastery of a body of knowledge;

4. To summarize texts accurately and synthesize information from a range of texts into new, meaningful, and unified perspectives;

5. To extract key concepts inductively from a body of information and apply those concepts in new situations;

6. To interpret a text from multiple perspectives, not merely from an entirely personal, "ego-oriented" one;

7. To gain thereby an understanding of the subjective nature of human experience;

8. To develop an understanding of the ways in which cultural values define what an individual experiences as "reality," influence the channels available for human expression, and affect the perception of and interaction among all areas of experience;

9. To develop an awareness of a text's relationships to the cultural and personal contexts in which it was created;

10. To engage in oral communication in a collaborative situation to arrive at possible meanings of a text and to develop an awareness of each reader's place in a community of readers;

11. To raise more questions about texts and circumstances than can be easily, comfortably, or possibly ever answered.

## THE NATURAL SCIENCES AND MATHEMATICS

The sciences use investigative methods to explain the natural world as it is perceived empirically. Mathematics develops logical systems not only to quantify this natural universe but to extend the body of abstract thought. We believe that students must learn to use these scientific and quantitative skills to solve problems more effectively and through the resolution of these problems develop a better understanding of the natural world.

The science and mathematics component of the General Education program at Marshall University should be developed as an active process in which students learn about science and mathematics by applying the methods and approaches of these disciplines. As students become intellectually competent through this active approach, they will depend less on the point of view of the teacher, textbook, or other authority, and more dependent on their own critical evaluation, interpretation, and quantification of results. In science they will be able to fit experimental results into broader theoretical structures and ultimately grasp the explanatory power which is inherent in scientific and mathematical

theory. Students will become scientifically literate only as they integrate mathematics and science into one interpretive and powerful tool. Mathematically literate students will not only recognize mathematics as a central component of science but will assimilate the essential methodology and structure that is characteristic of mathematics. Additionally, such knowledge makes it possible for students to identify and apply appropriate mathematical concepts and techniques to many other disciplines.

Students must understand the historic and philosophic roots of mathematics and science, as they effectively develop these skills. Students who have used scientific and mathematic methodologies, examined their presuppositions, and investigated their philosophic structure are more likely to understand such concepts as probability and causality and less likely to fall prey uncritically to the numerous false claims to which they are exposed.

Both general and specific goals need to be articulated clearly. In the general goals we propose the creation of an environment in the classroom and the laboratory which will

1. Increase student intellectual curiosity;

2. Increase student confidence so that students are more likely not only to take part in discussions but also to initiate discussions;

3. Encourage risk taking, i.e. students should not allow the fear of failure to deter them from intellectual risks; they should be able to justify answers and processes and should learn to find alternative answers and/or methodologies from failure;

4. Provide opportunities to use deductive and inductive logic and decrease student dependence upon authority;

5. Allow students to develop skills to evaluate ideas and positions without dependence on the instructor, text, or other authority.

Under the area of mathematical goals, students should be able to communicate mathematically. They should:

1. Write and read abstractions and their symbols, represent a problem in alternate ways, develop proofs or be able to explain solutions and represent mathematical algorithms using computer programs;

2. Learn mathematical methods in order to reason mathematically as well as recognize mathematical structured embedded in diverse contexts and write the appropriate mathematical model.

In regard to scientific goals, students should:

1. Become increasingly proficient in the use of the hypothetico-deductive method;

2. Identify the problem, recognize relevant/necessary information for problem solving, inductively form a theory, develop a hypothesis which tests the theory and attempt to falsify the hypothesis;

3. Be proficient in experimental methods and skills.

Since quantitative, written, oral, and listening skills are also crucial, students should be better prepared to evaluate quantitative information. They must distinguish between probability and possibility and recognize differences between populations and samples in the statistical sense. They should be able to predict the probable realm of correct answers, i.e. estimate approximate values or orders of magnitude. Further, they need to use the technical/professional literature effectively and to appreciate the differences in purposes and usage of primary versus secondary sources and use various information retrieval/reference sources effectively.

Because the integration of science and culture are crucial, students should be encouraged to investigate the historical, cultural, and philosophical significance of science and mathematics, question insights and beliefs, find contradictions, internalize ideas and concepts, compare those with value structures, and recognize the nature and consequences of fallacious thinking: ambiguities, tautologies, and forms of misleading generalizations.